DOBROMIŁA JAGIEŁŁA
Jagiellonian University in Kraków

THE PRAGMATICS OF PARENTHETICAL CONSTRUCTIONS: EVIDENCE FROM ENGLISH AND POLISH

1. Introduction

In this article, I address some problems that parentheticals, a group of formally dissimilar but functionally uniform linguistic expressions, pose for a semantic/pragmatic analysis. On the basis of the empirical data drawn from English and Polish (for comparison and to verify the theoretical claims), I re-examine the semantic/pragmatic properties of parentheticals and approach them from a relevance-theoretic perspective that introduces the distinction between conceptual and procedural meaning that linguistic expressions, parentheticals included, may potentially encode. I also investigate whether a relevance-theoretic account of parentheticals may help in a better understanding of parentheticals as a class of linguistic expressions and how it may clarify their status in linguistic analysis and theory.

2. Parentheticals in linguistic research: the state of the art

Linguistic communication is peppered with parentheticals. Whether in speech or writing, utterances are frequently interrupted by more or less complex parenthetical expressions, typically occurring in the middle of a linguistic structure (referred to as its host), "unintegrated in the sense that [they] could be omitted without affecting the rest of that structure or its meaning" (Biber *et al.* 1999: 1067), marked by punctuation (commas, parentheses/brackets, or dashes) in texts, and set off by comma intonation in speech.

With the definition formulated as above, *parenthetical* functions as an umbrella term for a wide spectrum of linguistic expressions and may include, among others, the following:[1]

(1) The driver of Al-Kindi's only remaining ambulance – *the other three had been stolen or looted* – has disappeared. So the dangerously ill Mr Khassem was bundled into a clapped-out rust-bitten Moskvich 408 (Blakemore 2006: 1671).
(2) A helicopter, a helicopter – *and there was me who'd never even flown in an ordinary plane* – would come and pick me up at … (Blakemore 2009: 11)
(3) What is obvious – *and we have eye-witness reports* – is that they were killed (Blakemore 2009: 11).
(4) Margaret Wynne Nevinson, *an active feminist*, who was a member of a school management committee for twenty-five years and who also served as a Poor Law Guardian, found her fellow male Guardians actively hostile.[2]
(5) Margaret Wynne Nevinson, an active feminist, *who was a member of a school management committee for twenty-five years and who also served as a Poor Law Guardian*, found her fellow male Guardians actively hostile.[3]
(6) In fact, *if you really want to know*, I think of you as a very attractive man.
(7) You'll need lots of patience, but *as you say* your boy has a good nature otherwise, the chances are you'll succeed.
(8) It is, *after all*, what we brought you here for – to resolve our problems for us.
(9) The colleges of South Kensington were involved in this along with other groups which, *unfortunately*, are passed over in this account.

Though intuitively and relatively easily recognized in utterances, parentheticals have proved to be a challenge for linguistic theory, where they have been analyzed from various perspectives: syntactic, semantic/pragmatic, or prosodic. As a result the studies available are hardly comparable and usually focus on different sets of phenomena. There is neither agreement in the literature on the criteria determining parenthetical status, nor consistent terminology used in reference to parenthesis.

Semantic/pragmatic studies are no exception, as there is no consensus in semantic/pragmatic theory on how the contribution of parenthetical expres-

---

[1] Parentheticals are given in italics and represent both written and spoken sources.
[2] The English examples provided here are from the British National Corpus (http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/), unless specified otherwise.
[3] In fact, it seems justified to claim that the entire: 'an active feminist, who was a member of a school management committee for twenty-five years and who also served as a Poor Law Guardian' can be considered parenthetical. More than one parenthetical can be associated with a single sentential structure (Espinal 1991).

sions to utterance interpretation and their discourse function should be best approached.

In the traditional speech-act accounts, it has been generally assumed that parenthetical expressions have no propositional meaning, i.e., they do not interact semantically with the utterance they are embedded in and do not affect the proposition expressed by the host. Rather, they indicate its illocutionary force (Urmson 1952), and comment on the main proposition. As *stage-directions* of some sort, parentheticals function as signals to guide the hearer to a proper appreciation of the host.

The traditional speech-act approach to parenthetical insertions stands in contrast to the perspectives taken by linguists analyzing language as a form of social interaction, where parentheticals are taken to be examples of disfluency characterizing unplanned discourse. In such approaches, as Wichmann (2001: 189) puts it, parentheticals are nothing but:

> hesitations, revisions and self corrections, incidental comments about what is being said in the host utterance, self-addressed questions and reminders, responses to something external to the conversation, and questions designed to elicit feedback or to check attention and as such, they are evidence that speakers have trouble planning their utterances, but are constrained by interactional principle to keep talking.

However, the discourse/pragmatic integration of the parenthetical with the host utterance or the lack thereof does not seem to be the only concern for parenthetical description in semantic/pragmatic studies. Given the existence of pragmatic links between the parenthetical and its host, it seems desirable to specify the range of their pragmatic functions. The problem is that, as already suggested, like other pragmatic markers, parentheticals can have any number of functions depending on the context and moreover, these functions may sometimes overlap. In consequence, it is not easy to reduce parentheticals to a single pragmatic meaning (Rouchota 1996, 1998). Bolinger (1989: 190), for instance, lists three main relationships that a parenthetical can have with reference to its host, which he classifies as:

- comments (often providing additional information or afterthought), e.g., *I think, I mean, I believe*;
- revisions, e.g., *or, that is, rather*;
- decisions e.g., *like, well, let's say*.

Thus, although it is traditionally assumed that there is a class of expressions that can be grouped together as parentheticals, intuition is often relied on when deciding what to include in the parenthetical class. Indeed, classification is not an easy task, taking into consideration the fact that when a parenthetical is taken independently of its host utterance, there is no single criterion which can be chosen to identify it.

In view of this, pragmatic research on parentheticals has two main goals: firstly to explain the use of parentheticals in actual discourse where parenthetical insertion seems to be to be a performance phenomenon, constituting *disfluency* typical of unplanned discourse and marked by special prosody, as in the examples in (1)–(3), and secondly to account for a class of parenthetical constructions intervening within a clause which are realized with the same comma intonation, presumably hold similar discourse functions, but which are taken to be licensed by grammar, as in the examples in (4)–(9).

Last but not least, since present-day linguistic research is characterized by broadening of the field to include new phenomena and there is more interest in constructions which are less prototypical, the definition of a parenthetical in terms of lack of syntactic, semantic and prosodic integration is not satisfactory. It has been shown that certain syntactic relations between the parenthetical and its host do exist: e.g., some binding effects and scope relations can be observed between the parenthetical and the host (Dehé and Kavalova 2007: 4). Furthermore, it has been argued, most notably by Blakemore (2006, 2009), that parentheticals do have propositional meaning and may contribute to the interpretation of the utterance they are embedded in by altering the context for its interpretation, which puts the non-truth conditionality of parentheticals in question. Finally, any of the important prosodic features can be suspended depending on the function of the parenthetical, its length and position (Bolinger 1989; Dehé and Wichmann 2010; Kaltenböck 2008, a.o.). This suggests that none of the features traditionally linked with parenthesis qualifies as a necessary condition.

Thus, the pragmatic function(s) that parentheticals can have with respect to their host utterances emerge(s) as the only one positive and reliable feature characterizing this class of linguistic expressions. Therefore the semantic/pragmatic relationship between the parenthetical and the host is worth re-investigating with a view to finding the ground for a unified pragmatic account of parenthetical phenomena.

3. Parentheticals in semantics and pragmatics: (non-)truth conditional meaning vs. non-unitary theory of semantics

As already mentioned, in the traditional speech-act accounts of parenthetical phenomena, their semantics has been explained in terms of non-truth conditional meaning. In this section, I focus on the meaning of parentheticals and the way they might contribute to utterance interpretation from a relevance-theoretic perspective, and more specifically, a non-unitary theory of semantics proposed by Blakemore (1987, 2006, 2009). This approach is discussed with respect to empirical data from English and Polish to see whether it has any

advantages over the traditional speech-act account and whether it might help clarify the semantic/pragmatic properties of parentheticals.

3.1. Non-truth conditional meaning

As observed by Grice (1989: 362), in the sentence such as (10) below, the meaning of the phrase 'on the other hand' differs from the meaning of phrases such as 'brother-in-law' or 'great aunt.' 'On the other hand' does not have a representational meaning, i.e., the meaning that encodes a concept and is part of the proposition expressed in the utterance, unlike 'brother-in-law' and 'great aunt.' Rather, it shows that the proposition should be taken as a comment, in this case of the contrastive type, on the propositional content of the utterance, thus constraining its context of interpretation:

> My brother-in-law lives on a peak in Darien; his great aunt, *on the other hand*, was a nurse in World War I (Grice 1989: 362).

Similarly to the contrastive 'on the other hand,' the parenthetical expressions 'I think' and 'you know' in (11) represent what Grice referred to as higher-level speech-acts in the function of comments (showing how the speaker is committed to the proposition expressed in the utterance) on lower-order speech-acts:

(11) a. That was a nice picture – Marie liked it, *I think*, cos she didn't mind me sticking it on the wall.
   b. He is one of those players you want on your side because *you know* he will be superb week-in, week-out.

However, as Ifantidou (1994, 2001) convincingly argues, being parenthetical is not a necessary condition for being non-truth conditional. In the examples below, the inserted expressions fit the definition of a parenthetical given above. Yet the parenthetical use of 'you say' in (12) contributes to the truth conditions of the proposition expressed in the utterance since the speaker will be understood to be committed to (13a) but not to (13b):

(12)   Because John is, *you say*, a spy, we should be careful what we say to him (Ifantidou 2001: 149).
(13)   a. We should be careful what we say to John because you say he is a spy.
       b. We should be careful what we say to John because he is a spy.

The examples shown above can be further compared to the ones in (14), which present the contrast first observed by Quirk *et al.* (1985): (14b), unlike (14a), does not have the same truth conditions as the sentence 'George is a liar':

(14)   a. George is, *as you said*, a liar (*but I don't believe it).[4]
       b. George is, *you say*, a liar (but I don't believe it).

The solution to the problem of the non-truth conditionality of parentheticals offered by Ifantidou (2001) builds on a hypothesis offered to this problem by Wilson and Sperber (1993). Simply put, the use of 'you say' marks the proposition expressed by the host clause as a proposition which is relevant as a representation of a thought which is not the speaker's, i.e., it is an example of interpretive use (cf. also Sperber and Wilson 1995). As such, it will not be understood as the expression of the speaker's commitment to the proposition but rather as indicating that the proposition is a faithful representation of another thought, i.e., the thought of the hearer. According to Sperber and Wilson (1995), the relationship between the proposition expressed and its interpretation is not that of identity but resemblance of content. In fact, the speaker in (14b) might be expressing any of the following propositions:

(15)   a. George never tells the truth.
       b. Whatever George has told you will be a lie.
       c. You should never believe what George says.

Thus, if the speaker using 'you say' as an example of interpretive use does not express his/her own commitment to the proposition, the inserted material will affect the truth conditions of the host. In (14a), on the other hand, the use of 'as you said' will be understood as the representation of the speaker's thoughts. This suggests that 'as you said' is not truth-conditional in this case. Ifantidou (2001) draws a distinction between parentheticals which do not affect truth-conditional content and those that do by marking it as a case of interpretive use or by affecting the strength of the proposition expressed. She does so with the help of two concepts: procedural and conceptual meaning, first introduced into the theory of semantics by Blakemore (1987).

3.2. Conceptual vs. procedural meaning

According to both Blakemore (1987) and Wilson and Sperber (1993), elements with conceptual meaning are said to contribute to the content of assertions and are analyzed as encoding elements of conceptual representations. Procedural elements, on the other hand, encode information about how these representations are to be used in inference, how these representations should be *taken*. In other words, while the former contribute directly to the construction of conceptual representations, i.e., concepts, the latter indicate how to manipulate these representations, i.e., procedures in communication, which on the RT approach,

---

[4] The denial in (14a) is inconsistent, as the 'as'-clause implicates the truth of its content.

is an inferential process. What is of vital importance, however, is the question whether the recognition of two types of meaning may help in a better understanding and description of parenthetical phenomena. What is more, it might be worth exploring if these generalizations carry over to other languages.

4. Discourse parentheticals and their pragmatic interpretation

The parentheticals in the examples given in (1)-(3) have never been analyzed as grammatically integrated into the host structure. However, following Blakemore (2006: 1684-85), the relationship between the parenthetical and its host in such examples can be captured by claiming that the parentheticals achieve relevance by contributing their own cognitive effects to the utterance interpretation, but in the context of assumptions made accessible by the interpretation of the host.

For example, in the English example (1) repeated below as (16) and in the Polish example in (17), the parenthetical and the host are related at the level of pragmatic interpretation. Each is interpreted as having its own relevance and the parenthetical does not contribute to a combined proposition whose relevance is greater than that of the parenthetical and host taken individually. However, as Blakemore (2009: 11) argues, the parenthetical is not completely sealed off from the truth conditional content of the host. Its relevance rests on the information about the truth conditional content of its host. Thus, the parenthetical identifies the conceptual content of the host but it does not affect its implicit or explicit content:

(16)   The driver of Al Kindi's only remaining ambulance – *the other three had been stolen or looted* – had disappeared. So the dangerously ill Mr Khassem was bundled into a clapped-out rust bitten Moskvich 408 (Blakemore 2006: 1671).

(17)   W prezydium Komisji Kultury zasiadał wówczas pan poseł Wełnicki – *nie pamiętam imienia* – sympatyczny skądinąd człowiek, który swoją rolę w tej komisji sprowadzał właściwie do odbijania telewizji publicznej, jak sądził, z jednego ugrupowania do AWS i tym się tylko w czasie obrad tej komisji – albo przede wszystkim tym się zajmował.[5]
'The Culture Committee was chaired by MP Wełnicki – I don't remember his first name – otherwise a nice man, who actually limited his

---

[5] The Polish examples provided here are from the Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego IPI PAN (http://nkjp.pl/), unless specified otherwise.

actions to retaking national television, as he thought, from one political party to the AWS party and it was the only thing – or the main thing he was concerned with.'

The parentheticals are pragmatically integrated with the host in the sense that they provide the answers to the question raised by the hosts ('Why was there only one ambulance?' in the English example and: 'Why is the person, the head of the national culture committee, referred to only by his surname?' in the Polish example). The relevance of the coordinated proposition is not greater than each of the conjuncts taken individually. This fact is supported by the impossibility of using 'and' to communicate pragmatic integration (cf. Blakemore and Carston 2005):

(18)   ?? The driver of Al Kindi's only remaining ambulance – *and the other three had been stolen or looted* – had disappeared. So the dangerously ill Mr Khassem was bundled into a clapped-out rust bitten Moskavich 408 (Blakemore 2009: 12).

(19)   ?? W prezydium Komisji Kultury zasiadał wówczas pan poseł Wełnicki – *i nie pamiętam imienia* – sympatyczny skądinąd człowiek, który swoją rolę w tej komisji sprowadzał właściwie do odbijania telewizji publicznej, jak sądził, z jednego ugrupowania do AWS i tym się tylko w czasie obrad tej komisji – albo przede wszystkim tym się zajmował.
'The Culture Committee was chaired by MP Wełnicki – and I don't remember his first name – a nice man by the way, who actually limited his actions to retaking national television, as he thought, from one political party to the AWS party and it was the only thing – or the main thing he was concerned with.'

A different type of pragmatic integration of the parenthetical and its host is shown in Blakemore's (2009: 11) example given in (20) and the Polish example given in (21):

(20)   A helicopter, a helicopter – *and there was me who'd never even flown in an ordinary plane* – would come and pick me up at …

(21)   W parlamencie podniósł się wielki krzyk – *nawet konserwatywnie nastawione panie poczuły się urażone, jakby ktoś nazwał je towarem z drugiej ręki* – więc ostatecznie projektu nie uchwalono.
'An outcry arouse in Parliament – even pro-conservative women MPs felt offended, as if somebody called them second-hand stuff – so eventually, the proposed bill was not passed.'

In contrast to the previous examples, it seems that the parentheticals in (20) and (21) affect the interpretation of the host at the level of implicit communica-

tion. In particular, it might be proposed that the parenthetical has no relevance beyond its effect on the interpretation of its host in that it modifies the context for the recovery of the implicit content of the host and contributes, together with the host, to the recovery of a single proposition, greater than either of them individually. The parenthetical in the English example encourages the hearer to re-consider the contextual assumptions made accessible by the concept of the helicopter for the derivation of implicatures which capture the excitement of travelling in a helicopter for someone who has never flown in any kind of plane at all (Blakemore 2009: 12). With respect to the Polish example, it can be argued that the hearer is expected to revisit the contextual assumptions made accessible by the concept *wielki krzyk* ('an outcry') and derive the implicature of MPs' total criticism, as a result of which the proposed bill was not passed.

To see how parentheticals can affect the interpretation of their hosts at the explicit level, it is necessary to explain the difference between explicatures and higher-level explicatures introduced into the Relevance Theory by Sperber and Wilson (1995).

In RT, explicatures are explicitly communicated assumptions, i.e., linguistically encoded logical forms enriched in such a way as to express determinate propositions, as illustrated in (22a):

(22)   a. John$_i$ is at home.
       b. Ann is saying that John$_i$ is at home.
       c. Ann is asserting that John$_i$ is at home.
       d. Ann thinks that John$_i$ is at home.

Optionally, the proposition may be embedded under a higher-level description: a speech-act description (22b) or a propositional attitude description ((22c) and (22d)). As such, they are referred to by Wilson and Sperber (1993) as higher-level explicatures. Higher-level explicatures, like logical forms and fully propositional forms are conceptual representations recovered by a combination of decoding and inference (Wilson and Sperber 1993: 11). While to obtain (22a) the hearer must decode the semantic representation of the utterance, to obtain the higher-level explicatures in (22b)–(22d) the hearer must make additional inferences about the speaker's attitude to the proposition that is being expressed and the type of speech-act that is being performed. This is because both explicatures and higher-level explicatures have their own truth conditions and, therefore, are capable of being true in their own right. Only the proposition expressed, however, contributes to the truth conditions of the associated utterance. The higher-level explicature will not be part of the truth-conditional content of the host utterance.

In view of this, the parentheticals illustrated in (23) and (24) might be said to affect the interpretation of the host at the level of explicit content. They

might be said to contribute to higher-level explicatures; in other words, their relevance is in the effect they have on the hearer's understanding of the degree of commitment being communicated by the host.

(23) What is obvious – *and we have eye-witness reports* – is that they were killed (Blakemore 2009: 11).

(24) Tak się akurat składa, że owe wszystkie informacje czerpię z tych samych, *lub jak przypuszczam, chyba tych samych*, źródeł, jak mój adwersarz.
      'It seems that I obtain all the information from the same, or at least I'm assuming that they are the same sources, as my opponent does.'

In (23), the hearer is intended to recover a higher-level explicature conveying a greater degree of commitment to the proposition expressed than any higher-level explicature possible to be recovered otherwise, in (24), on the other hand, the hearer is intended to recover a higher-level explicature which conveys less certainty towards the truth of the proposition expressed (Blakemore 2009: 13–14).

In (25) shown below, the parenthetical contributes explicitly to the interpretation of the host as well, but this time, by specifying how the quantifier 'każdy' ('every') and its reference should be identified. Thus, it enables the hearer to make hypotheses about the relevance of the information communicated by the host. In particular, it appears that the parenthetical specifies how its domain should be interpreted.

(25) Każdy przedsiębiorca spełniający warunki, *to znaczy ten, kto poniesie nakłady inwestycyjne nie mniejsze niż 100 000 EUR*, będzie mógł tam zainwestować.
      'Every businessman who will meet the demands, that is the one who will invest no less than 100,000 EUR, will be allowed to invest there.'

Further, the parenthetical in (26) may achieve its relevance at the level of explicit content of the host by taking part in what may be labeled as on-line concept construction (Carston 2002). To begin with, the hearer decodes the meaning of 'przedtem' ('before'). The parenthetical, on the other hand, will communicate the information that will encourage the hearer to use contextual assumptions further to recover the concept the speaker wishes to communicate by uttering 'przedtem' as the period of three years they lived in Ostrowiec after leaving Warsaw:

(26) Przedtem – *to znaczy w ciągu trzech lat, które przeżyli w Ostrowcu po opuszczeniu Warszawy* – mieszkali w śródmieściu, w reprezentacyjnej Alei Trzeciego Maja i w bliskim sąsiedztwie koszar, w których stacjonował głośny pułk ułanów ostrowieckich.

> 'Before – that is during the three years they spent in Ostrowiec after
> leaving Warsaw – they lived in the city centre, in the prestigious Aleja
> Trzeciego Maja and in the close vicinity of the barracks, in which a well-
> -known uhlan regiment of Ostrowiec was deployed.'

To sum up, it seems that, contrary to the existing accounts, the discussed examples should not be treated as instances of disfluency or explained in terms of interactional principles which require speakers to keep talking (Wichmann 2001: 189). Rather, as Blakemore (2006, 2009) argues, within a relevance-theoretic account, they can be explained in terms of the pursuit of relevance. Following Sperber and Wilson (1995: 204) it might be observed that the fact that an utterance is produced and processed over time means that a hearer will be able to access some of its constituent concepts, with their associated logical and encyclopedic entries, before others. This means that certain contextual assumptions will be triggered before others, and that the hearer, who is assuming optimal relevance, will use these to construct hypotheses about the speaker's informative intention. In all of the examples discussed above, the use of the disrupted structure is consistent with the speaker's aim of achieving relevance for a minimum cost in processing effort.

This might lead to the preliminary observation that true parentheticals will always carry some relevance to the interpretation of the host. It should not be assumed, however, that discourse parentheticals *are* truth-conditional. At the same time, though, they are not completely sealed off from the truth conditions of their hosts. If *truth conditions* can be roughly understood as "the truth conditions of the thought communicated by the host" (Blakemore 2009: 16) and this thought is to be recovered from the encoded semantic representation by pragmatic inference, it seems that the parenthetical affects truth conditions at the level of pragmatic interpretation. The relevance of parentheticals lies in the role they play in the pragmatic enrichment of their hosts and they have no relevance beyond this role.

5. Parenthetical comment clauses: concepts or procedures?

5.1. Parenthetical comment clauses: a challenge for syntactic and semantic/pragmatic analyses

Having tried to clarify the exact role of pragmatics in the interpretation of discourse parentheticals, it will be interesting to see whether the pragmatic interpretation of the parentheticals introduced in (4)–(9) can be captured in

similar relevance-theoretic terms. These parentheticals differ from the ones in (1)–(3) in that they have been treated as grammatical phenomena since, following Espinal's (1991: 727) observation that

> it seems obvious that our knowledge of a natural language also tells us whether a given substring that apparently occurs within a syntactic unit is syntactically independent of the rest of the string or whether it is incorporated into a single phrase marker, and that this knowledge should be accounted for by linguistic theory.

The intuition that the grammar generates linguistic structures with embedded parenthetical constituents is shared by many linguists, among others, by Taglicht (1996: 195), who claims that grammatical parenthetical phenomena must be distinguished from diversions and intrusions which characterize spontaneous discourse and there must be something that justifies generating an utterance with a parenthetical but not the utterance of 'Come in' in the middle of the sentence when hearing a knock on the door. This assumption has implications for analyzing parentheticals in linguistic theory. In particular, accommodating syntactically independent, though linearly ordered parentheticals in syntax, in which the notions of precedence and linear order play a vital role, has been a considerable challenge. Further, due to their status as a syntax/pragmatics phenomenon, it is still debatable whether their properties stem from their grammar or whether they have a purely pragmatic explanation.

In the middle of this debate come parenthetical comment clauses that seem to be central in the description of parentheticals due their syntactic and semantic properties. On the one hand, they are clausal in nature and are taken to contain representational meaning, just as discourse parentheticals do; on the other, they are argued (e.g., Brinton 2008) to be non-truth conditional, phonologically short, procedural pragmatic markers, similar in behavior and function to discourse markers. Thus, they seem to be suitable candidates for being reinterpreted in terms of conceptual or procedural meaning within a relevance-theoretic framework.

5.2. Comment clauses in speech-act accounts

Since the influential Urmson's paper (1952), the verbs 'think,' 'know,' 'believe,' 'mean,' 'suppose,' etc. are referred to as parenthetical verbs and treated in the traditional speech-act literature as similar to illocutionary or attitudinal adverbs, i.e., indicating the speaker's degree of commitment to the proposition expressed. Illocutionary and attitudinal adverbials do not contribute to the truth conditions of the utterances they are embedded in by all standards for non-truth conditionality.

Similarly, parenthetical comment clauses are argued not to contribute to the proposition expressed and since their only function is that of a *formula* or an *indicator* (Austin 1962) of the performance of the act, they fit the speech-act semantics just as other illocutionary force indicators, the above-mentioned adverbials or, say, performative verbs.

Thus, on the standard speech-act account, the parenthetical comment clauses in (27b)–(27d) would be considered stylistic variants ('I think' is said to be loosely attached to the sentence it accompanies and can be reordered) that weaken the strength of the assertion expressed in (27a) and give rise to complex speech-acts:

(27)   a. John is insane. [stronger]
       b. *I think* John is insane. [weaker]
       c. John is, *I think*, insane. [weaker]
       d. John is insane, *I think*. [weaker]

However, as Ifantidou (1994: 197) observes, if the examples in (27b)–(27d) involve complex speech-acts, i.e., two utterances (the one with the assertion and with the comment clause), there is no convincing explanation why each one could not have its own truth conditions and the parenthetical comment clause should be devoid completely of any descriptive content.

Further, the equivalent examples from Polish in (28) do not support the claim that all the sentences in (27) are stylistic variants. Crucial syntactic differences can be immediately noticed in (28a) if compared to (28b)–(28c):

(28)   a. *Sądzę*, że Jan jest szalony.
       b. Jan jest, *jak sądzę*, szalony.
       c. Jan jest szalony, *jak sądzę*.

The first sentence cannot be taken to contain a true, syntactically unintegrated parenthetical, since its syntactic representation would be that of a complex sentence with a transitive verb in the main clause followed by an object which is a subordinate clause introduced by the complementizer 'that.'

Moreover, 'I think' in (27b) is truth-conditional. This can be supported by applying a truth-conditionality test, i.e., embedding the sentence with the expression to be tested into a conditional and seeing if this expression falls within the scope of 'if' (Ifantidou 1994: 198):

(29)   If *I think* John is insane, he will not be arraigned or tried.

The question is, as Ifantidou (1994: 199) formulates it, under what circumstances the speaker is claiming that John will not be arraigned or tried. If 'I think' makes no contribution to truth conditions, it should be synonymous with:

(30)   If John is insane, he will not be arraigned or tried.

However, the two sentences are not synonymous. 'I think' does fall within the scope of 'if' and is truth-conditional.

True parentheticals (i.e., stylistic variants, with the parenthetical comment clause in the sentence-initial, mid-sentence and sentence-final position) are illustrated by the English examples in (31) and their Polish counterparts in (32), respectively:

(31)   a. *I think*, John is insane.
        b. John is, *I think*, insane.
        c. John is insane, *I think*.
(32)   a. *Jak sądzę*, Jan jest szalony.
        b. Jan jest, *jak sądzę*, szalony.
        c. Jan jest szalony, *jak sądzę*.

The truth-conditional tests confirm this claim (irrespective of the position of *jak sądzę* 'I think' within the sentence). In the example (33) below, *jak sądzę* 'I think' does not fall under the scope of 'if' and, in consequence, proves to be non-truth conditional:

(33) Jeśli Jan jest, *jak sądzę*, szalony, nie będzie oskarżony ani sądzony. (= (34))
(34) Jeśli Jan jest szalony, nie będzie oskarżony ani sądzony.

Moreover, parenthetical comment clauses seem to take the whole utterance in their scope (both in the English and the Polish examples below):

(35) If John is insane, he will not be arraigned or tried, *I think*.
(36) Jeśli Jan jest szalony, nie będzie oskarżony ani sądzony, *jak sądzę*.

5.3. Parenthetical comment clauses in a relevance-theoretic account: how do comment clauses comment?

Given the distinction between conceptual and procedural meaning that expressions in a natural language may encode, the question that arises is whether parenthetical comment clauses fall on the conceptual side of this distinction, i.e., whether they encode constituents of conceptual representations and are similar to discourse parentheticals in this respect or whether they are procedural, i.e., whether they show how the associated utterances should be inferentially processed.

As argued by Rouchota (1998), expressions that encode procedural meaning can be expected to exhibit properties indicative of their non-conceptual

status. Their meaning should be relatively difficult to bring to conscious awareness; such expressions also should not combine with other expressions to form expressions of greater semantic complexity in the way conceptual expressions do. Procedural expressions also should not be subject to relations of entailment or contradiction. Conceptual expressions, by contrast, have phonetic and syntactic representations and concepts as their constituents. Besides, they can enter into logical relations such as contradiction or entailment; they can describe or partially characterize a certain state of affairs, they can be true or false, and they can act as input to inference rules.

The speaker using a parenthetical can be accused of making an untruthful claim (Ifantidou 1994: 202):

(37)   A: John is waiting at the airport, *I think*.
       B: That's not true; you don't think anything of the sort.
(38)   A: Krytyk literacki nie mógłby, *jak sądzę*, zasnąć po lekturze tych wierszy.
       'A literary critic wouldn't be able, I think, to fall asleep after reading these poems.'
       B: Nieprawda, nie sądzisz tak wcale.
       'That's not true, you don't think so.'

Examples like the above thus suggest that although comment parentheticals do not contribute to the truth conditions of the utterance in which they are embedded, they can be true or false in their own right, which implies that they encode concepts.

The next argument for the conceptual status of parentheticals is their potential compositionality: they can have a complex syntactic and semantic structure:

(39)   John is, *I increasingly tend to think*, a fool.
(40)   This is, *I strongly suspect, despite all indications to the contrary*, a Tintoretto.
(41)   I sądzę, że właśnie ta trudność sprawiła – *tak przynajmniej sądzę* – że trzeba było w tekście sprawozdania słowo zmienić.
       'And I think that this particular difficulty – at least I think so – led to the necessary change of the word in the report content.'
(42)   Warszawa kojarzyła mi się z zimą, a Sulejówek z latem, które, *jak wtedy sądziłem*, trwa tu także zimą.
       'I associated Warsaw with winter, whereas Sulejówek with summer, which, I thought at that time, lasted there during winter as well.'

As Ifantidou (1994, 2001) argues, the parentheticals in the utterances (39) and (40) above seem to encode concepts, which are capable of undergoing

regular compositional semantic rules. It is not clear how they can be analyzed in procedural terms.

As shown in the previous section, discourse parentheticals may contribute to the pragmatic interpretation of an utterance at different levels: implicit or explicit.

Ifantidou (1994, 2001), following Wilson and Sperber (1993), argues that true parentheticals, comment clauses included, contribute to the explicit aspect of communication as well. If explicatures are taken to be explicitly communicated assumptions of an utterance and may include the proposition expressed by this utterance and higher-level descriptions obtained by optionally embedd-ing this proposition under a speech-act verb or a propositional-attitude verb, then it might be proposed that parenthetical comment clauses can be analyzed as providing the hearer with explicit guidance as to the intended higher-level explicature. To obtain the higher-level explicatures the hearer must make additional inferences about the speaker's attitude to the proposition and the type of speech-act the speaker is performing and the greater the degree of decoding involved, the more explicit the communication (Ifantidou 1994: 204).

Thus within the RT framework, the fact that parentheticals encode concepts, though they are non-truth conditional, can be captured since higher--level explicatures may contribute conceptual representations (truth-conditional in their own right) recovered by a combination of decoding and inference. For example, in (43) the parenthetical 'I think' is non-truth conditional and it can be taken to provide the hearer with explicit guidance as to the intended higher-level explicature in (44) (Ifantidou 1994: 204):

(43)   John is, *I think*, at the airport.
(44)   Mary thinks John is at the airport.

However, as Ifantidou (1994) notes, the problem with this analysis is that it assigns the same propositional structure to true parentheticals and their main-clause counterparts. It appears then that true parentheticals encode the same conceptual information as main-clauses and the claim that the addition of a comment clause sentence-initial, mid-sentence and sentence-final to achieve a specific pragmatic effect to weaken or strengthen the assertion is not accounted for.

One solution (Ifantidou 1994, 2001) is to treat the host and the parenthetical comment clause as two utterances, two separate speech-acts, one commenting on the other, just as in the case of discourse parentheticals discussed in the first section. This analysis might be supported by the accounts in which parenthetical expressions are taken to be phonologically, syntactically and semantically independent of their hosts. On this approach, (43) would assert that John is at the airport and that the speaker thinks that John is at the airport,

with the main point of the utterance being made by the most deeply embedded assertion (Ifantidou 1994: 206). Thus, intuitions about the truth conditions of the parenthetical in (43) are intuitions about the subpart that makes the major contribution to overall relevance, which constitutes its main point.

Further, the fact that parentheticals express a diminished commitment to the proposition expressed follows from the semantics of the constructions together with considerations of optimal relevance provided in (45) from Ifantidou (1994: 206).

(45) An utterance, on a given interpretation, is optimally relevant if:
    a. it achieves enough contextual effects to be worth the hearer's attention;
    b. it puts the hearer to no unjustifiable processing effort in achieving those effects.

The very fact of requesting the hearer's attention by means of an utterance creates in him an expectation of optimal relevance. By the condition specified in (45a), the utterance is expected to yield more effects than any other information the hearer could have been attending to at the time. According to the condition in (45b), the speaker who wants to eliminate any risk of being misunderstood, should make the intended interpretation as easy to recover as possible.

According to the definition of optimal relevance, the extra processing effort incurred by the parenthetical construction 'I think' needs to be offset by extra or different contextual effects, which in this case, is a diminished commitment to the proposition expressed. Where the parenthetical is 'I know,' the extra contextual effect would often be a strengthened commitment to the proposition expressed. If the speaker wanted to communicate a strong assertion, she would have done so and would have spared the unnecessary effort and avoided a misunderstanding.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I have looked at the semantic/discourse properties of parentheticals from a relevance-theoretic perspective, which takes the pragmatic effects parenthetical phenomena contribute to utterance interpretation to follow from the considerations of optimal relevance. However, if the explanations RT offers are to be convincing, some further questions need to be answered and additional work needs to be done. For example, in a recent paper, Kaltenböck (2008) investigates the communicative uses of parenthetical comment clauses in a corpus of spoken English and establishes a link between prosodic properties of parentheticals and different pragmatic functions they may have. Specifi-

cally, he argues that lack of prosodic independence (i.e., comma intonation) of a parenthetical element can suggest a different communicative use, i.e., a textual function that can be a result of continuous semantic bleaching and represent different stages in an ongoing grammaticalisation (or pragmaticalization) process. As structuring devices, these comment clauses have little semantic content, they help the speaker to overcome production difficulties and maintain fluency, and the hearer to signal what belongs together and to structure the information flow. Comment clauses that have an epistemic relationship to the proposition they modify, on the other hand, would be mostly prosodically independent of the phrase to which they are attached.[6]

It remains to be seen in future research if similar observations on the relation between the individual prosodic patterns of comment clauses and their contribution to interpretation in discourse are universal and carry over to other languages.

References

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Biber, D., S. Johansson, G. Leech, S. Conrad and E. Finegan (1999). *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. Harlow: Pearson Educational.

Blakemore, D. (1987). *Semantic Constraints on Relevance*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Blakemore, D. (2006). Divisions of labour: The analysis of parentheticals. *Lingua* 116: 1670–87.

Blakemore, D. (2009). On the relevance of parentheticals. *Actes d'IDP* 09: 9–17.

Blakemore, D. and R. Carston (2005). The pragmatics of sentential co-ordination with *and*. *Lingua* 115(4): 569–89.

Bolinger, D. (1989). *Intonation and its Uses. Melody in Grammar and Discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.

Brinton, L. J. (2008). *The Comment Clause in English. Syntactic Origins and Pragmatic Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Carston, R. (2002). *Thoughts and Utterances: The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Dehé, N. and Y. Kavalova (2007). *Parentheticals: An introduction.* In N. Dehé and Y. Kavalova (eds.). *Parentheticals.* Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Dehé, N. and A. Wichmann (2010). The multifunctionality of epistemic parentheticals in discourse: Prosodic cues to the semantic-pragmatic boundary. *Functions of Language* 17 (1): 1–28.

Espinal, T. M. (1991). The representation of disjunct constituents. *Language* 67 (4): 726–62.

Grice, H. P. (1989). *Studies in the Ways of Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

---

[6] A similar claim is offered in Dehé and Wichmann (2010) and Payà (2003).

Ifantidou, E. (1994). Parentheticals and Relevance. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 5 (1994): 193–210.

Ifantidou, E. (2001). *Evidentials and Relevance*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Kaltenböck, G. (2008). Prosody and function of English comment clauses. *Folia Linguistica Acta Societatis Linguisticae Europaeae* 42 (1) 2008: 83‑134.

Payà M. (2003). Prosody and pragmatics in parenthetical insertions in Catalan. *Catalan Journal of Linguistics* 2: 207‑27.

Quirk, R., S. Greenbaum, G. Leech and J. Svartvik (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Harlow: Longman.

Rouchota, V. (1996). Discourse connectives: what do they link? *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 8 (1996): 1‑15.

Rouchota, V. (1998). Procedural meaning and parenthetical discourse markers. In A. Jucker and Y. Ziv (eds.). *Discourse Markers: Descriptions and Theory*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. 97‑126.

Sperber, D. and D. Wilson (1995). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Taglicht, J. (1996). Constraints on intonational phrasing in English. *Journal of Linguistics* 34 (1): 181‑211.

Urmson, J. O. (1952). Parenthetical verbs. *Mind* 6: 1 480‑496.

Wichmann, A. (2001). Spoken parentheticals. In K. Aijmer (ed.). *A Wealth of English. Studies in Honour of Göran Kjellmer*. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgiensis. 177‑93.

Wilson, D. and D. Sperber. (1993). Linguistic form and relevance. *Lingua* 90 (1/2): 1‑25.